DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 695 CG 029 691

AUTHOR Kennedy, Robert; Christian, Linda Garris; Bell, David
TITLE Adolescent Identity Development: Views of the Future.
PUB DATE 1999-11-00
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Point Clear, AL, November 17-19, 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescent Development; *Adolescents; Career Awareness; *College Sophomores; *Expectation; Higher Education; Interpersonal Competence; Personality Development; Personality Traits; Self Efficacy; Social Cognition; Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

This paper describes what education students observed while studying adolescent development in a sophomore college class. The students became particularly interested in how a person's identity development interfaced with his or her ideas about the future. By using the instrument "Teens and the Future," they were able to survey adolescents about their perceptions of the future and ask about their personal plans, goals, and college interests. Survey results concurred with other research that concluded adolescents have unrealistic expectations and inconsistencies in their views for their future. Several challenges for teachers of adolescents became evident as the pre-service teachers examined the survey results. A major challenge is how to teach students to reconcile career goals and life goals when they conflict with each other. Some goals that lead to conflicting situations for adolescents include college versus marriage, living near home versus moving for jobs, and personality preferences versus taking jobs that are available. (Contains 17 references.) (JDM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 436 695

Adolescent Identity Development: Views of the Future

Robert Kennedy
University of Arkansas
Little Rock, Arkansas
(501) 569-3555

Linda Garris Christian
Adams State College
Alamosa, Colorado
(719) 587-7873

David Bell
Arkansas Tech University
Russellville, Arkansas
(501) 968-0392

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Kennedy

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Presented at
Mid-South Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
Point Clear, Alabama

November 16-19, 1999

CG029691

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Adolescent Identity Development: Views of the Future

What does the future hold? Who am I? Who do I want to be? What do I believe? How do I get from where I am to where I want to be? These are questions asked by adolescents every day, sometimes consciously and directly, but more often by their actions. Many of their behaviors are governed by these questions. Parents and teachers often become frustrated dealing with the changing faces of an adolescent. Changes may be outward, physical, sudden and overt or they may be more subtle, gradual and thoughtful changes. For example, in June a young male may be wearing jeans and a T-shirt, listening to mainstream popular music and playing on the baseball team. By August he has shaved his head, has multiple body parts pierced, and is not a member of any organized group at school. Many of his political and religious ideas are exactly opposite that of his family. When he returns to school after Christmas, he may have dyed the hair he now has purple, begun wearing baggy, sloppy clothing and joined the art and theater clubs. His life ambition is to buy a Volkswagen and travel around the United States and "experience life". He thinks that by age 30 he will probably earn about 100,000 a year doing "something in art". At the close of the school year, he has his hair back to its natural color, is wearing button-up shirts and nice jeans and is a member of the Future Business Leaders of America.

A young adolescent girl may be also be experiencing changes; she may exhibit this inner struggle differently. When she begins the school year she may be totally committed to her decision to make good grades to increase her chances of a scholarship for college. She plans to major in forestry. She seems firm in her beliefs about God and her faith. However, during football season, she begins dating an older boy who works part time in a local factory and spends much of his free time hanging out with his friends. By Christmas, she is in love and wants to take extra credits the spring semester so that she can finish high school a year early. She abandons many of her long time friendships in order to spend extra time with her boyfriend. Her goal is now to finish high school and get married. College is not out of the question, but is definitely on the back burner. Her new love breaks up with her on Valentines Day to join the Marines. she finds herself confused and lonely and questions many of her former ideas about life. For a few weeks

she seems depressed and sad. Then she gradually becomes more like her old self. By the end of the year she has made new friends, renewed a few of her old relationships and become interested in a career in politics or engineering. Her summer plans are to work as a counselor at an art camp for disabled youngsters.

These views are representative of what education students observed while studying adolescent development in a sophomore college class . During the course of the semester, they became particularly interested in how a person's identity development interfaced with his or her ideas about the future. Because many of these college students were recently adolescents, they could easily relate to what they had read about identity development. They knew that as teachers they would be working with adolescents in this stage and wanted to be prepared to facilitate the transition from childhood to adulthood for their students.

As the pre-service teachers examined the literature on adolescents and identity development, Erikson's Identity versus Role Confusion Stage seemed to be a recurring theme. According to Erikson (1950), many adolescents are in Identity versus Role Confusion stage. During this period adolescents are asking questions which will lead them to develop their own identity. Some of their searching and experimenting is acceptable to the adults around them while other activities may result in disagreements and conflict with family and other authority figures. Identity development is also influenced by the level of cognitive development. Erikson (1968) believed that formal thought capabilities were necessary to achieve identity development. In one study, concrete thinkers were shown to be more likely to be in an identity development level of foreclosure or diffusion whereas formal operational thinkers were more likely to be in moratorium or achievement (Skinner, 1983). Foreclosure may be a particular risk for rural students (Beatman, 1996). Since the service area of the university is primarily rural, this was particularly relevant information. Hektner (1995) addressed the conflict rural adolescents often experience. They want to live in their same communities but also want to get an education and good job. Even if they do go to college, they may not be able to find employment in their field and stay in the area. Because of this many decide early on a career choice that will allow them to remain in their home community. This "foreclosure" (Marcia,1980) may be a risk for older adolescents who prematurely commit to an externally

derived identity (Beatman, 1996). Because of limited experiences and opportunities rural adolescents may commit to an identity which fits in with "who they need to be" in order to stay in the community. They will fail to explore alternatives, which could lead them to a positive identity achievement. For some this may mean giving up college goals while for others it may mean never considering college or options open to them.

The pre-service teachers believed that college was an important step in identity development for many adolescents. Adolescents also agree; Reed (1995) reported 81% of students plan to attend college, and Hektner (1995) found 70-80% expect to finish college. There is a positive relationship between educational expectations and parent education. Wilson and Wilson (1992) found educational aspirations of adolescents are very influenced by SES and educational level of parents. Many of the pre-service teachers found this disturbing; several of the local schools COE studies had shown that up to 60% of children lived in homes where at least one parent did not graduate from high school.

Although the pre-service teachers didn't find a great deal of information about adolescents' views of the future, they did find studies dealing with future aspirations and concerns about the future. They did find one study in USA Weekend magazine that answered some of their questions (May, 1990). The instrument used, "Teens and the Future", seemed right on target for what the students wanted to learn. They decided to use it as a model for their own research. Over the course of several semesters, 886 students, ages 10 -19 in rural Arkansas were given the instrument.

Method

There was a total of 886 adolescent students surveyed, 413 of whom were males and 473, females with ages ranging from 10 through 19.

The instrument used was the USA Weekend Teen Survey reprinted from the May 18-20, 1990, issue, with permission from the editor. The survey addresses students' perceptions of the future, as well as their personal plans, goals, and college interests. For the purpose of this article, career goals, academic expectations and family plans will be reported.

Results

The items on the survey were analyzed for differences between the sexes and among the age groups. In response to the question, "If you could be whatever you want when you grow up, what would you be?", females were more inclined than males to be teachers and non-doctor medical professionals. Males were more likely than females to want to be athletes, businesspersons, and police officers or members of the military. The most popular goal was to become an athlete.

Almost all of the students, regardless of age or gender, intended to graduate from high school. More females planned to attend college than males; however age did not seem to be a factor. There did not seem to be a relationship between sex or age and what is most important in picking a college. Most respondents primarily wanted to obtain a good education. Most respondents listed satisfaction or income as the most important thing wanted from a job or career. When asked about moving away from family or friends in the future, most respondents said that they were not worried.

There were several items on the survey related to marriage, family, and children. There was no difference between males and females on marriage, children or divorce questions; however age did seem to influence answers. Older students more often thought they would get married and have children while younger students were less sure. They also thought they would not get divorced while younger students were less sure.

Discussion

The students surveyed are similar to students in past studies; careers in medicine and teaching are top choices for females (Alger, 1997, USA, 1990) as are athletics for males (USA, 1990). Almost all students plan on finishing high school (USA, 1990) and most plan on attending college (Alger, 1997, USA, 1990). Since there are many teen marriages and teen parents in the area surveyed, their expectation that they would get married and have children (*not necessarily in that order) may be a very realistic expectation for them. Most of the service area in the study is family-oriented with a strong work ethic. The "no divorce" expectation of the adolescents could be explained by the lower number of divorces in their communities as compared to national averages. However, it is also likely influenced by their belief in the personal fable – it can't happen to me.

The fact that moving away from family and friends was not a concern was somewhat of a surprise; however, it may not be a concern because they don't plan to do it. Students may assume without question that they will continue to live near family and friends as adults. This is an accepted and expected pattern for many communities. Another question could be added to the survey to obtain more information regarding this issue. Obtaining a good education seemed to be the main factor for all students in picking a college; this may be linked to their emphasis on the importance of a job that will pay well. According to the 1990 survey (USA Weekend), students often picked pay over satisfaction, while students in this research ranked them about equally. This is consistent with FAME (1997: College Aspirations Research Report).

Implications and Applications

Lesko (1996) says a principle of teaching is "to begin where students are". This study gave the pre-service teachers a picture of where students in their area are. They, too, found inconsistencies and unrealistic expectations similar to Walker (1987). Adolescents' comments included remarks like, " I want to be an underwater sea diver" but also from the same youngster "I want to live at home in Russellville, Arkansas" (which is nowhere near an ocean or sea). Another example which the pre-service students found interesting was the career goal of being an accountant from a student that said she liked being outdoors and was a "people person". Several challenges for teachers of adolescents became evident to the pre-service teachers as they examined the survey results. One was that of how to expand the expectations and career opportunities for students without contributing to the "leaving" of young people that some communities have experienced. They recognized that jobs that paid well were limited in the area; yet pay was a key factor for the adolescents as they examined career options. Another was finding a way to help students in the midst of their identity crises in their struggle to define career goals and life goals and then reconciling the two when they are at odds. Still another challenge identified was the conflict between adolescents' goals of college but also of marriage and children. Marriage and children had contributed to many of the pre-service teachers' own delay of education as well as difficulty with balancing supporting a family financially and emotionally and school work when they returned to school. Since most of the pre-service teachers were products of and planned to teach in rural schools, they were

keenly aware of their need to begin thinking about these challenges. Their research helped them in their resolutions to work with adolescents in positive ways during those critical years of identity development.

Bibliography

Beatman, J. (1996) Identity foreclosure in late adolescence as a manifestation of the false self. Thesis - University of Hartford.

Erikson, E. (1963). Childhood and society (2nd ed.) New York: Norton.

Erikson, E. (1968) Identity, youth and crisis. New York: Norton.

Hekther, J. (1995) When moving up implies moving out: Rural adolescent conflict in the transition to adulthood . Journal of Research in Rural Education, 11(1) 3-14.

Heller, H. The need for a core, interdisciplinary, life sciences curriculum for the middle grades in
Takanishi, R. (ed.) (1993) Adolescence in the 1990's; Risk and opportunity. Teacher's College Press, New York.

Lesko, N. (1996) Past, present, and future conceptions of adolescence. Educational Theory, 46(4), 453-72.

Marcia, J. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson, (Ed) Handbook of adolesecent psychology. New York: Wiley.

Monir, S. (1990) Adolescent agreement with perceived and actual parental educational and occupational aspirations. A thesis - Arizona State

Skinner, P. (1983) The interaction between formal operational thought and ego identity development in late adolescence and early adulthood. A dissertation in home economics submitted to Texas Tech University.

USA Weekend (1990). Teen Survey in USA Weekend, May 18-20, 1990.

Walker, J. (1987). Young people want it all! Journal of Extension
Received from Tomlinson Library through interlibrary loan from Arkansas State Library

Wilson, P. and J. Wilson. (1992) Environmental influences on adolescent educational aspirations: A logistical transform model. Youth and Society. Sage Publications.

http://www.famemaine.com/aspire/aspire2.htm
FAME: College Aspirations Research, Report of Findings, February 13, 1997

http://www.horatioalger.com/state.html
The State of Our Nation's Youth (1997-98) ED 413046
author Cromer, Janis. L - Alger in that report?

http://YOUTH.OS.DHHS.GOV/youthinf.htm#new
Youth Information Directory - Profile of America's Youth

http://www.cio.com/archive/cio_1_1_96_next_content.html
CIO Magazine Archive - Dec 15/Jan 1, 1996 WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BRING